

Echo

A third approval for travellers' eviction

12:00pm Friday 20th May 2011

A COUNCIL has been told to get on with evicting travellers from Dale Farm after the plan was approved for a third time.

Basildon Council's development control committee met in private to consider the latest personal information about up to 96 families living on the site.

They had the option not to press ahead with the £18million flattening of the site in Crays Hill, and could have voted to use other, cheaper tactics such as a High Court injunction.

But, despite pleas from opposition councillors to try this less confrontational and costly alternative to eviction, members voted five to two in favour of carrying on with direct action.

Despite approving the eviction, no firm timescale has been put in place.

Len Gridley, 52, whose home in Oak Road, Crays Hill, borders the site and wants it cleared due to it devaluing his property, called on the authorities to get on with it.

He said: "We have been in this position so many times before now. I don't think anyone will believe it will happen until the 28-day notices are served."

The eviction was previously given the go-ahead in 2007 and 2005.

The council has to serve legal notices giving the travellers 28 days to leave before an eviction can happen.

The authority agreed to set aside up to £8million to fund the eviction in March. However, Essex Police fear the eviction could cost the force up to £10million, and it is still waiting to hear if the Home Office will help with its funding.

Council leader Tony Ball said: "We are now awaiting Essex Police's bid for Government funding before 28-day eviction notices are served, and would encourage families to move off peacefully to avoid the need for eviction."

On making the latest eviction decision, Stephen Hillier, chairman of the development control and traffic management committee, said: "I would like to emphasise this is a new decision, and follows the committee members' careful review of each individual case and the updated personal circumstances, along with legal and policy changes.

"The committee made a fair, unbiased judgment on the most appropriate course of action on an individual basis, and with full regard to all relevant matters."

Traveller campaigner Grattan Puxon is investigating if the committee decision is actually valid, as it was taken before the committee was officially appointed at the council's annual general meeting, which takes place on May 26.